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# INDEXA

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Daily Information Session — 14.236 MHz @ 23:30z

## Central Kiribati (T31A)—2011

By John P. Kennon, N7CQQ

The selection of Kanton Island, Kiribati came after the loss of a choice of going to Jarvis Island (KH5). Jay (W2IJ) and I became Co-Leaders as we complement each other in our management skills. Jay's last DXpedition was Clipperton 1992, so he has forgotten all the bad stuff about DXpeditions. I do one every year or so, even with the bad stuff. Thus, our year of preparation began. Jay spent most of his time,



energy and efforts in finding a boat, getting ham licenses, and then discovering all the fun requirements of the new PIPA area. The country of Kiribati had formed a protected area around some of their islands. We needed a permit to enter; nobody had yet desired a permit, so we were the first to test the water.

A previous DXpedition, which will go unnamed, failed due to an engine failure on their boat. We went through the normal DXpedition ups and downs, adding and losing participants. I worked on equipment, parts and pieces. Most of the equipment was staged at my Arizona location. It was packed in shipping containers and pallets for transportation to the shipper near the port of Long Beach. All in all, some 7000 pounds of equipment was assembled.

The shipping date came; I loaded all the pallets onto a 20 foot goose neck trailer and hauled it to Jay's place in California. The next morning we drove to Long Beach. It was early March. The off loading was quick; each pallet was weighed and recorded. We were back at Jay's house that afternoon.

Jay and I planned to depart a week before the rest of the group to rest in Apia, Western Samoa, and to be at

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inside. . . . **Donald Sereni, KB6KTV, now a Silent Key.**

## Central Kiribati (T31A)—2011 (Con'd)

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the port when our chartered boat arrived. That was the plan—it did not turn out just that way. Upon arrival we found that the 7000 pounds of equipment had in fact arrived and was in a bonded warehouse next to the Apia Marina Hotel where we were staying. A short walk to check it out and retrieve my personal luggage and life was good. My personal luggage had an ICOM IC-7000, a small SteppIR vertical and all the other parts to have a small ham station at the hotel.



Our equipment via boat—we flew!

Once in Western Samoa, we were off to the “Office of The Regulator” to get my 5W0QQ license and setup began. The week was filled with about a 1000 Qs in the log for Western Samoa. Phil, W9IXX also had his station setup at the hotel, increasing the ham population by 200%. Only one other ham was active on the island, and we would meet him later that day.

Within a day or so the boat owner/captain arrived at the hotel. We had a very hard time getting accurate information from him about when the boat was actually going to arrive. Turns out, the owner, had booked work for the “Discovery” from Tahiti installing buoys on the equator. He would fire the acting skipper upon his “late” arrival to Apia. The boat was not available for us to inspect or work out details of our trip; this was the beginning of our own “Boat” problems. When dealing with companies outside the United States, one **CANNOT**, expect to get what

you might expect from a US boat charterer. So the boat was two days late arriving and three days late in departing. This increased both our stress and our Samoa hotel bill.



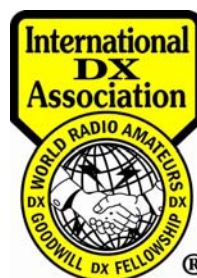
Luggage gets sorted out as the balance of the team arrives.

Next was the voyage to Kanton Island. I heard three and a half days, four days, and what we got was a five (5) day journey. It is about 660 nautical miles and the boat averages 6 knots—you do the math. So, the trip to Kanton took longer than we had expected by far. The boat did NOT have A/C, the hot water was never turned on (we don't need it said the captain) and the kitchen refrigerator was

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inadequate to supply food for 15 people. I won't even continue about the head. The crew was a couple who had volunteered to act as crew on the boat. One good point was that the male half of the couple was actually working on his seaman's papers. The food enroute was less than expected. However, I was able to have cold/warm cereal each morning, and we did have a sufficient amount of Samoan beer to quench one's thirst.

Our vessel, "Discovery" is a working boat with a 55 foot waterline. It is not very stable in the water (although much more so than a mono-hull sailboat, for example). We did not get Pina Colodas served on the top deck, nor were we fed Chateaubriand for late supper, but neither did we expect that kind of voyage. Despite our poor start, the food was pretty good over the duration of the trip. Several of the berths were below decks, in the catamaran hulls, where the diesel noise is loud and the rocking is accentuated. All in all, it was a tolerable trip, but nowhere near fun.



**Some hired local manpower helped us move our 7,000 pounds of equipment off the boat.**

We were welcomed on Kanton by a whole gang of folks, including Davis, the Chief of Police and Immigration Officer. He is young, bright and enthusiastic. Several of the local guys helped us unload the gear while our team leaders scouted locations. We were feeling extreme pressure to get on the air, since we were so late arriving. Starting the morning of April 21, we built antennas like the crazed hams

we are, despite the 95° temperature combined with 95% humidity. (I have to thank Paul, W8AEF, for all the work he put into the SVDAs—we felt loud all the time). We were at least partially on the air by the end of that day. The CW station was about 2000 feet away from the SSB station and we had to use a small ATV (that we brought to the island) to transport gear to it. Of course, with fewer operators, we were all totally fried by evening, so it took a couple days to really get rolling. The 160m, 6m and 60m antennas were last to go up. On our 2<sup>nd</sup> full night of operating, we had a massive downpour which found its way through the roof and air-conditioning ducts (operational in the 1940s) onto all 3 of the CW stations. You might even find some remnants of asbestos here too. After spending a couple hours trying to hold trash bags over the radios, computers and amps, we had to stop and move all the equipment.



**As guests of the island, we simply had to curtail operations and accept the feast presented for us. (Read more below)**

We also discovered that the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced Kir-a-bass) has arbitrarily moved the dateline slightly east, so that Kanton is on the same date as the rest of the country. This only made a difference to us because the locals wanted to have a feast for us on Saturday. We thought—no problem—that's 2 days away, and we will be kicking butt by then. Unfortunately, it was really the next day—so we all had to stop and go eat with them, for what turned out to be over 3 hours. For us, it was a wonderful opportunity to meet the people (there are 21

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## Central Kiribati (T31A)—2011 (Con'd)



**Above, the Kanton Post Office and radio station.  
Below the Kanton village.**



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people among 6 families on the island), exchange gifts and learn some of their culture—for the DXers chasing T31A it was an unpleasant interruption.

Life on this island is quite simple. One can get a feeling for this simplicity in the photos shown above.

Speaking for the CW operators (which, besides Jim K6ZH, Bud K7CW, included Mike, N9NS, Arnie, N6HC, Phil, W9IXX and a bit of Paul, UX2HO) we spent a significant amount of time trying to work Europeans. The openings were short and as always, the EU ops were not all cooperative, but we did the best we could. NA and JA were incredibly

loud whenever a band was open and I feel like they always stood by patiently while we tried to pull out the weak EU stations. We all had to learn the band openings also—they were not consistent from day to day—but we could count on fairly dead bands from roughly 9 AM to 1 PM local time.

The QRN on 80m and 160m was horrendous, and we felt obliged to work the higher frequency bands until they closed—usually fairly late at night or even at dawn—because they were often open to EU at that time. We had a beacon on 6m and it was reportedly heard by stations in E5, FK and JA, but we could never find out about an opening until it was over. Our EME plans were shot because of our late arrival and the need to leave early. We also operated RTTY, although no one really was a RTTY enthusiast. Bud helped N7CQQ get started on RTTY. He, Arnie, N6HC and Paul UX2HO made the 1000 RTTY QSOs, which were made from the SSB camp and thus affected the SSB QSO total. The first QSO in the log was W8AEF. It was magic, within a millisecond of our first CQ, Paul had us. Great Job Paul!!!!



**Mike, N9NS, works down the SSB pileup.**

The SSB ops included Jay, W2IJ, Mike, N9NS, Arnie N6HC, Bud, N7CW, Paul, UX2HO, Dave, N1EMC, Romanov UA4HOX and N7CQQ. It was a joy to work with all these guys; Romanov UA4HOX was especially fun to work with...work, work more work. He and Paul enjoyed the low bands at night. Rain was not too much of a problem for us. The

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“shack” was well covered. In fact, it was used as a collection point for rain water. Our equipment worked great, but we wished we could have done more Q's from SSB.

We were forced to leave a day earlier than planned because of the time it took us to get to and from Kanton. Antennas came down and gear was packed and loaded on the boat in record time, again with the help of the locals. The locals had no local source of much of anything except fish and LOBSTER, so a bunch of us left clothes, shoes and anything else we did not want to want to cart back home. It is a real eye opening experience to witness life in other countries. We are truly blessed with all the comforts we have at home.

### Tsunami Station

Two of our operators volunteered to repair the Tsunami Warning station for the USGS. The first cut on the work was to only replace three of the batteries and do some adjustments to the solar cells on the roof. It took a bit more work to get the station up to



**Two tired volunteers finish up restoring operability of the Tsunami Station—for a brief period. (See Text)**

specifications. We got it running the day before we left. It had not functioned for three years. (Late update: a month after returning to the USA, the Tsunami Warning Station has stopped functioning at night. We don't know why—a return trip is contemplated.)

The weather on the return trip was not nearly as pleasant as the outbound trip. We passed close to Tokelau (ZK3) but did not stop. I can't think of a worse way for anyone to spend four days—seasick and watching the same old ocean drift by—minute by minute . . . seemingly forever. We kept checking the GPS for miles remaining to Samoa and it never seemed to change much.

Back at Apia, the equipment was unloaded, repacked and returned to the bonded warehouse. After arriving home we thought about whether we needed paperwork for Kanton. The answer was no: the equipment departed the USA to Apia, Samoa accompanied by a “Carnet” which is different from our inventory in that it reflects the final returning equipment. It arrived at Apia in the international zone and was stored in the bonded warehouse. From there it was released into the international zone for our personal use. Since Kanton had no customs officials, there was no need to use the Carnet. The Carnet is a document that allows us to ship equipment to and from different countries without the burden of paying taxes or duty and facilitates any customs inspections. It still cost \$3,500 to ship our gear to Apia and \$6,000 to return it to the USA. Yay, no tax or import fees!!!

The equipment is sitting in the port here in the good ole USA as I write this article, but we now face new paperwork challenges. What? We don't know, but I am sure by Wednesday of the week after this is

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**Operators and Kiribati citizens gather for a photo op.**

## Central Kiribati (T31A)—2011 (Concluded)

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being written the sky will fall once again on your fearless leaders.

We made just over 31K QSOs, with roughly 17K on CW, 13K on SSB and 1K on RTTY. For those who want to know basic DXpedition statistics, I've provided Tables 1 and 2, on this page to let you know how the QSOs split up by Band/Mode and by Continent, respectively. Also, I think you'll enjoy looking over our website for complete information on the operators and for our extensive photo gallery.

(<http://www.t31a.com/>)

It was really great to hear all the folks calling in—thanks for the QSOs.

Our thanks go out to INDEXA for their financial support—without it Kanton, T31A, would not have been possible.

Band	CW	PH	RTTY	Total
160	598	0	0	598
80	855	652	0	1507
60	0	44	0	44
40	1013	779	0	1792
30	1763	0	0	1763
20	3008	1481	653	5142
17	3469	2978	1	6448
15	3459	3306	391	7156
12	1776	1654	0	3430
10	1913	1971	0	3884
<b>Total</b>	<b>17854</b>	<b>12865</b>	<b>1045</b>	<b>31764</b>

Table 1: Band/Mode Breakdown

73 es gud DX— *John Kennon* N7CQQ

Band	160	80	60	40	30	20	17	15	12	10	Total
<b>Africa</b>	0	2	0	14	8	31	21	23	5	0	104
<b>Antarctica</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Asia</b>	191	526	0	557	512	1435	1674	2269	1296	1787	10247
<b>Europe</b>	15	41	0	123	81	1587	2715	1366	102	6	6036
<b>N. America</b>	352	845	42	953	1072	1869	1874	3118	1851	1771	13747
<b>Oceania</b>	40	85	2	116	70	172	125	268	134	254	1266
<b>S. America</b>	0	8	0	29	20	48	39	112	42	66	364
<b>Totals</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>1507</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>1792</b>	<b>1763</b>	<b>5142</b>	<b>6448</b>	<b>7156</b>	<b>3430</b>	<b>3884</b>	<b>31764</b>

Table 2: Continental Breakdown

## Donald Sereni, KB6KTV now a Silent Key

On October 17, 2011 INDEXA lost a helpful, competent member who acted as a "prime mover" of the INDEXA information session. Donald A. Sereni, KB6KTV was that man. Don succumbed to cancer after a valiant fight against the disease.

Don had been one of the members of the INDEXA Staff which keeps the INDEXA Information Session on the air daily at 2330Z on 14.236 MHz. The session provides QSL information as well as tips, rumors, and items of information to DXers regarding DX activity. Don joined INDEXA in September 1992, became a Life Member later that year, and was appointed an Information Staff member in July 1993. For most years since, we could usually find Don on the sessions even when propagation was not the most favorable. While a number of resources available on today's Internet provide an alternative way to acquire this information, a core group of people enjoyed checking into the sessions, if only for the camaraderie.

One such person is Dr. Samuel Hawes (K4DGJ), a retired surgeon from Charlotte, NC. Sam writes, "I never had the opportunity to meet Don in person, but felt really close to him from our many QSOs and the regular informa-

tion sessions on 14.236MHz. He was so patient with everyone on the air and went way beyond his role as control station to give out addresses, and other DX information. Along the way, he certainly helped me get some "new ones", and I will always remember that about Mr. Don! He took his role as control station for INDEXA very seriously and spent HOURS with good or bad conditions on 14.236 nightly. We spoke many times after his diagnosis of thyroid cancer. Being a physician, I could relate to his treatment, and I'd like to think my empathy helped Don deal with his ultimate fight. He had radiation therapy early on, and that caused his voice to be very weakened. He couldn't work a lick of CW, and I bugged him incessantly about it until he got the key out. He worked EVERY day till he became proficient at it and before long he called me to tell me that he had earned DXCC on 30 meters! Besides his passion for ham radio, he loved his family big time, and he and his wife Cami (Camille) had a love for each other that was very special and something you don't find every day. I will certainly miss hearing 'kilo bravo six kilo tango Victoria' on the air, and all who knew Don will miss him."

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